

It's Not Enough to be a Xerophilous Program Manager

How Are Your People Skills?

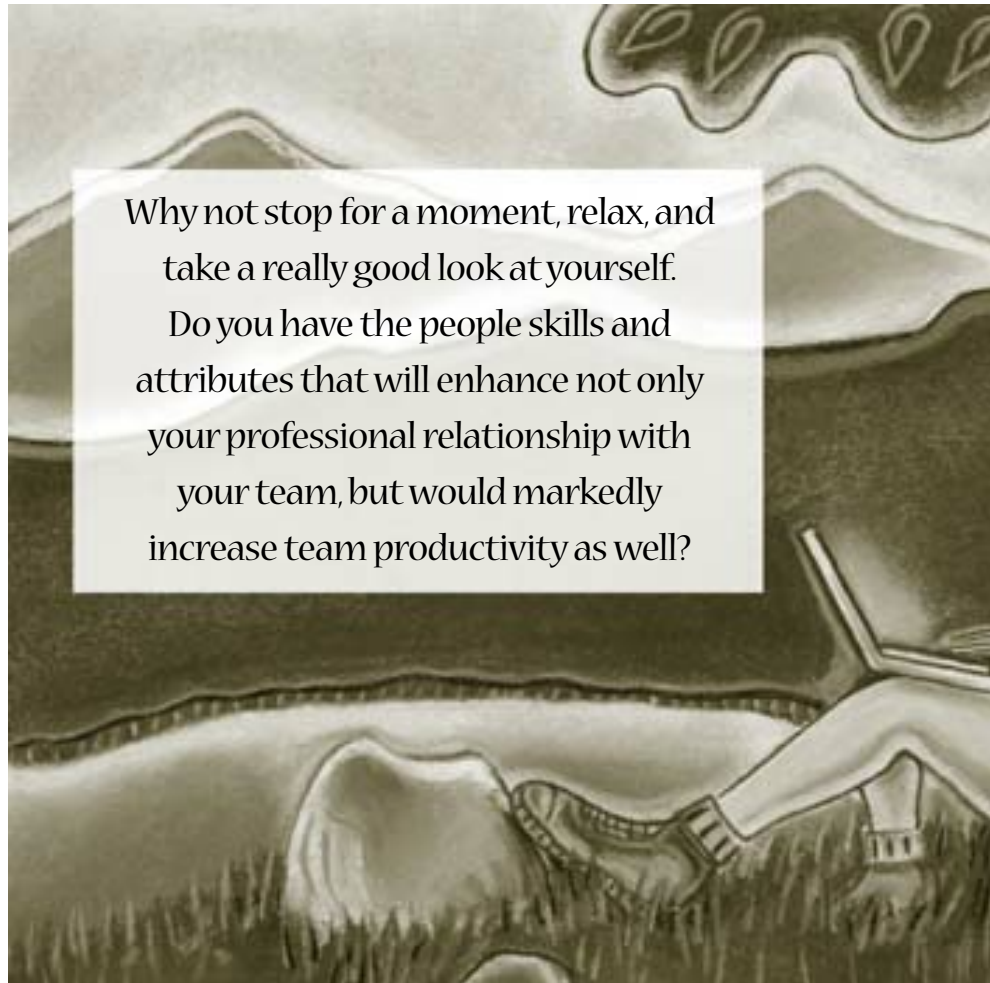
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It's not enough to be a xerophilous Program Manager (PM) these days. Sure, you can calmly sit in a Congressional Hearing and expertly answer rapid-fire questions with cameras rolling and 50 angry, vein-bulging senators slicing and dicing every program decision you've made over the last three years. You can single-handedly turn a mere 24 software lines of code into a fully functional "whizbangit" and simultaneously write the maintenance manual that will leave users gasping with admiration. You can recite the Federal Acquisition Regulation in 10 minutes and competently calculate the next six outyears' budget in five minutes. But, how are your people skills? Do you have any? Do you care? (Hint ... you should care!)

Personality Attributes vs. Managing People

The PM's functional and technical abilities are important, as those competencies guide the project. Besides the project, though, what or whom does the PM manage? Obviously, people. Now, people are a quirky commodity. They like to be considered as contributing, valuable, unique specialists — not as merely tolerated, impersonal, expendable resources. Remember the expression "cold pricklies" and "warm fuzzies"? People, for some amazing reason, respond better (translated — they'll work their keester off for you) to kindness, recognition, and fairness ("fuzzies") than to arrogance, disregard, and favoritism ("pricklies").

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Therefore, with so much to gain, why not stop for a moment, relax, and take a really good look at yourself. Do you have the people skills and attributes that will enhance not only your professional relationship with your team, but would markedly increase team productivity as well?

Some of those fuzzy-producing skills and attributes PMs would do well to cultivate are listed here from A to Z:

Acknowledge Accomplishment

Fuzzy PMs recognize accomplishments and take the time and energy to acknowledge verbally or with a formal reward both large and small feats. They pass fuzzies to all their team members, and they ensure no one is overlooked.

Believable/Credible

Believable PMs are credible. Their word is their bond. They don't tell a story one way for one group of individuals and change it again for another, while hoping the various groups won't compare notes.

Communicate

Instead of fostering the game of Gossip (where one person hears something and



passes it on to another and after awhile the data bear no resemblance to the truth), people-skilled PMs relate information to the entire team at once, not just to select individuals. Whether through e-mails or all-hands meetings, PMs tell their team members the same information simultaneously.

Delegate

PMs who know how to delegate and *do*, earn their team's respect. They then find themselves free to concentrate on the

programmatic better suited to their office. Though PMs may be able to handle every task, by delegating to others they demonstrate their trust of others' abilities.

Ethical

Let's face it. It's just too complicated to remember the exact lie you told to whom, and when, and how to cook the books medium well. Ethical PMs "tell it straight" and "walk the talk." Adhering to the highest ethical standards is not always easy, but PMs who practice ethics in all their dealings can look others in the eye with a clear conscience.

Friendly

How hard is it to say "hi" to people or to acknowledge them with a smile, especially if they are members of your team? Since when was courtesy declared evil? Friendly PMs catch more flies ... er, teammates, with honey than with vinegar (didn't your Mom ever tell you that?).

Giving

Fuzzy PMs give of their time (they attend meetings when they say they will) and of their project money (they give time-off awards or cash awards).

Honest

When honest PMs chop down the cherry tree, they admit it. If five people have to be let go from the team, honest PMs do so in a straightforward manner. They don't lie, but they aren't brutal with the truth. They balance kindness with honesty.

Inspirational

Fuzzy PMs inspire people to do their best through their own inspirational actions. They set a good example (Mom would be proud).

Just

Just PMs are fair PMs. They listen to both (or more) sides of the story and make a just determination. They refrain from rushing to judgment, and everyone is treated as equals.

Kind

Kind PMs send a personal note (or even an e-mail) to congratulate a birth, offer condolences to the bereaved, or offer thanks for a special act. They take an interest in their team members and talk

to (or e-mail) each person as often as possible. They keep up with the temperature of the team — are there problems they can help solve? Does someone need anything that they can provide? Is anyone being "hung in effigy" in the parking lot?

Listen

Are you listening out there? Effective communication is an important asset for any PM, and so also is effective listening. Listening is willfully re-

ceiving those radio waves that strike your ears, internalizing and transmitting them further to your "gray matter," thus achieving comprehension. When listening to someone, say the speaker's name and recap what he or she had to say. Be courteous and listen to what is being said.

Motivated

Actor to director: "What is my motivation?" Your enviable work ethic and professional attributes will motivate others to imitate you. As PMs, each of you are your team's director. You provide team and project motivation. Your team sees you take the high road in every circumstance.

Nonjudgmental

You do not judge a book by its cover. You do not judge people by their eth-

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nicity, skin color, age, sex, race, or pimple count. Other than performance and actions directly related to a team member's official personnel appraisal, you do not judge at all lest you be judged.

Open

Open door. Open book. Fuzzy PMs welcome anyone who needs to see them. Some may even set work hours conducive to their own productivity, and they honor their availability.

Positive Attitude

"Laugh, and the whole world laughs with you; cry and you cry alone." PMs can't laugh all of the time (flashback to Congressional Hearing), but they can be upbeat and positive. See the glass as half full, not half empty. Actions follow attitudes.

Qualified

Qualified PMs inspire trust and confidence. They keep up with professional courses. They read the Trades. They attend seminars when possible. And, just as important, they keep their people qualified as well.

Responsive

Is this you? "If I wanted that done tomorrow, I would have asked for it to-

morrow?" Likewise, when something is asked of you that needs to be accomplished now, *do it now.*

Spirited

Animated PMs are easier to work with than Johnny Monotone. If your team hasn't fallen asleep after 77 seemingly sibilant syllables ... zzzzzzz ... huh? Look around — does your audience simultaneously check for light leaks after each of your brilliant monologues?

Trustworthy

You can keep a secret, and you do not break your word. Period.

Understanding

Fuzzy PMs can "walk a mile in another's shoes." You understand that people experience good and bad days and have highs and lows (just like you). You are able to work with them to achieve the best for them — and for the project.

Valorous

Having good old-fashioned courage to stand up for what's right when everyone else is running for the hills is an admirable trait. As vanguard of your team, are you brave in the face of all project perils? (Think bulging veins, award fee evaluations, and personal evaluations...)

Wakeful

In this sense, are you alert and watchful? Do you anticipate what should or could happen next to the project? Do you plan ahead and prepare your team for contingencies?

Xerophilous

Able to survive in a hot, dry environment are the Xerophilous PMs! But no man is an island. Each successful team functions effectively with its PM to produce project success.

Zealous

Zealous PMs have a zest for life, and enjoy their work. They treat their team the way they would like to be treated, a la the Golden Rule; and they often succeed where others before them have not.

If, after reading the above examples of people skills and personal traits, you can relate to only two or three, you might want to tweak your professional personality. Respected and rewarded team members feel appreciated and respond in kind to PMs who demonstrate more than xerophilia.

Editor's Note: The author welcomes questions/comments. Contact her at betty_lunch@stricom.army.mil.

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